

9.
SATURDAY, JUNE 18, 1870.

Subject: Sympathy of the "Divine" Spirit.

PLYMOUTH PULPIT:

A Weekly Publication

OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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HENRY WARD BEECHER.

PLYMOUTH PULPIT.

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SYMPATHY OF THE DIVINE SPIRIT.

“Always the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”—ROM. VIII., 26.

It is not to be supposed that the Divine Spirit is here said to utter audible outcry in the presence of God; nor are we necessarily to understand that the groanings, the sighs, which men under profound religious aspirations make, are directly the influence of the Divine Spirit—that is, that men are merely, as it were, the pipe through which the sound is produced; but rather, that all those high experiences of men's souls who hunger and thirst after righteousness, by which they long and sigh and groan, are in them the result and work of that Divine Spirit. It is the interpretation that is given to invisible truth by the Spirit of God that leads men to these yearnings and desires. These higher forms of Christian experience are therefore wrought in men, and they are signs of the work of God that is going on in the human soul.

A soul that is born into the kingdom of divine love is like an infant that has come into the human family. It has life; but it has everything to learn about life. It is helpless, ignorant, inexperienced; but the whole household, on the human plane, is organized to meet the exigency of infant life, by surrounding it with an atmosphere of love and of pity. The wealth of its parents has provided a protection from the seasons. The roof and the walls defend it, and not the less because they do it silently and unobtrusively. They are no less the work of the parents' love, because the child becomes used to them, and sees them, year by year, all the way up from childhood to manhood. The house is as the natural world. In the parallel and analogy, natural laws, like the roof and the walls, are not the less expressions of the divine provident care because we have become used to them.

The whole order of the household—its interior economy—is determined with reference to the best welfare of the children. The love of the parent's heart furnishes to the child the care and the tenderness which it needs. And the parent's experience and worldly wisdom and

provident skill mark out the beginning of the child's life, and weigh and plan a business for the child. So that from the moment of its helpless birth up through the unfolding series of its years, it is surrounded, quite without its own cognizance, and without much of its own help, with a training-school where health and wisdom and experience are providing for its whole welfare, until it is able to take care of itself.

Now, the whole scheme of this world is like that. The natural globe, natural laws, the divinely-arranged economy of human society, are all of them but ministrants in the household which God has made, and into which men are born helpless; and all of them are under the supervision of parental divine love, working for the young immortal.

Let me read the whole passage:

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know all things work together for good to them that love God—to them who are called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

It is quite possible for one to assume not only a monarchical standpoint, but the standpoint of a monarch who is using the great and unconscious forces of nature, to interpret this passage so as to make it not lovely—not attractive—certainly not true. For if we undertake to say that God, by special act and attribute of foreknowledge, saw all things from the beginning to the end, and that, seeing all things, he tied things where they were to be, and, as it were, put engines of irresistible force all the way along down through life, so that when men came to the different points in their career they could not help themselves, but went to the right or the left because the reversible switch had been turned, and they had to go where the track was; if we believe that God predestinates men to this and that and the other thing, and that when they have once come into the charmed circle of divine fate they cannot help themselves, and are to be glorified or damned, as the case may be; if we give that governmental and monarchical interpretation to it, you will set every thinking man, almost, kicking against the pricks, and you will be launched on that voyage of infinite argument and infinite confusion which has grown up since man had an existence, and will find yourself vainly endeavoring to solve those doctrines of free-will, fate, predestination, fore-ordination, election, effectual calling, irresistible

ble decrees, and all those great questions which no man ever yet was able to manage—except while he was yet speaking. For when *his neighbor came and searched him* he had to speak again. This passage, if you take it on the ground of a governmental and monarchical administration, is a declaration of one of those great outlying views which defies inquisition, and is far beyond the reach of the unaided understanding. But if you take this passage to be paternal, in the line of the figure which I have opened, somewhat, there is no difficulty in it.

Every father and mother, when the helpless child is born into the household, rejoice and give thanks to God. They rejoice and give thanks, not because of what it is now, but because of what it may become. The mother gives to it her nights and days. The father gives to it all his leisure and all his occupation. And what is it that strikes joy down through the burdened and oppressed soul of many a mechanic, many a merchant, many a banker, many a literary man, in the intervals of leisure, but the thought of that light which is burning at home—the blessedness of the cradle? The mother broods over it, and the father broods over it; and they say, “That child shall be brought up to honor, and truth, and virtue, and usefulness.” The father lays his own life along the road, and takes sight across it, and in the light of his experience he marks out what he means that the child shall be; and the mother takes sight along the level of love, and determines what the child shall be. The father and mother work and co-work, determining what, if their efforts are successful and their hopes are realized, that child shall be. They foresee and predestinate, and call effectually, and work together to bring that child up good and true and prosperous.

We are taught to say, “Our Father who art in heaven.” We are taught that when men are born into this world, God looks, in a sympathetic paternal way, along down the path of life, and says, “All the power, and all the sympathy, and all the coöperative influences of the world, and all nature itself, are to serve this young, trusting, loving, immortal spirit.” *To those that love God all things shall work together for good.* The moment a man puts himself into sympathetic communication with God, nature and time and all the forces thereof assume new relations to him. The moment a soul binds itself trustingly to the bosom of its loving God by love, nature has God’s command to take care of him, and providence has God’s command to take care of him, and God’s wakeful Spirit forever broods over him and works in him.

This doctrine of the divine sympathy has here a specialty. While the general doctrine which I have unfolded is unquestionably true, here is a special application of it. And the general doctrine is made more affecting and more desirable by this specialty which is given to it. I

refer to the declaration in our text, that "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities."

Everybody, I do not care how dull he is, loves to see a great nature that devotes itself, not to those who are on a level with him, but to those who are beneath him. We expect that those who are drawn together by affinity will be devoted to each other. We should expect that if one Lord Bacon were in conference with another Lord Bacon, they would sit together and commune all through the livelong night. But to see a man whose head is a vital encyclopedia, who knows all things, as it were, go past his equals, and go down below those that are able to understand the main part of him, and devote himself to children in the family; nay, more than that, to see him take care of little children in that spot where they break out in things that are bad; to see him take care, not of children that reward his pains by a quick understanding of what he says, but of children that are dullards; to see this man of learning, this president of some college, this mighty professorial, encyclopediac man, take the unpromising child of the family where he is spending the summer, or where he is an occasional visitor, on his knee, and try to beat into its thick head one idea after another; to see him pay no special attention to the other children of the family who are bright and intelligent, and manifest no particular sympathy for those with whom he would be supposed naturally to fraternize; to see him patiently continuing this labor of love from day to day and from week to week, working the child along, working him along, and working him along, until he succeeds in getting something into him, and bringing him up so that the neighbors say, "Well this child, after all, may turn out to be something; there seems to be a mine in him which, if worked, will yield some return; that man has quarried till he has struck gold in him"—to see such a man denying himself of those things which his education and culture eminently fit him to enjoy, that he may inspire in the dullest child a desire for knowledge, and develop in that child those elements which it most lacks—is there any human being worthy of the name, who would not admire it as noble and almost divine? "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our"—what? Our aspiration towards things high and beautiful? Oh, yes. Our noblest dreams? Yes, doubtless. Our grandest purposes? Oh yes, the Spirit helpeth them. Our relative excellences? Yes; undoubtedly. Our generosity and magnanimity? Without a doubt the Spirit helps them. All the moods of nobility into which we come? To be sure, the Spirit helps them. But that is not it. "The Spirit likewise also helpeth our *infirmities*." The teaching of Scripture is that God, instead of standing over us with a rod of justice, with a sword, to chastise us for our faults, stands by our side to help our failings.

Listen to the way in which it is more largely wrought out in the fourth chapter of Hebrews :

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have no high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

What, then, do we understand by *infirmity*? It is, in general, feebleness, weakness; but, in the spiritual application which it has in the New Testament, it indicates a weakness of a peculiar kind—namely, *moral* weakness. Feebleness of conception and knowledge in religious things is infirmity of knowledge—a lack of it; poverty of it. Feebleness of the will-power by which we resist evil—that is an infirmity. There are thousands of men who do wrong because they have very feeble resisting power. There are multitudes of persons who fall into wrong courses on account of the feebleness of their power of self-restraint, which is only a variation of the will-power. There are many who find it extremely hard to lay a hold-back hand on the impetuosity of their passions. Great feebleness in the presence of evil, with a peculiar susceptibility to temptation, will be apt to be carried away by it.

This is hinted at where, in another place, it is said that God *will not suffer you to be tempted more than you are able to bear*—indicating that there are some who, the pressure being brought upon them, can bear it, and that there are others who, the pressure being brought upon them, cannot bear it.

In a conflict of knights some will rush together with poised spears, which, striking each other's shields in a given way, will both be shivered to the handle. The knights, under such circumstances, *having done all, stand*. Others, paralyzed by weakness, rush against their antagonists, and being unable to resist the shock, are hurled to the dust, and vanquished. Their overthrow is the result of infirmity, or weakness—not weakness that amounts to spiritual imperfection, but weakness in the sense of feebleness. Feebleness of the whole economy by which we are to come into knowledge, and through knowledge into virtue, and through virtue into vital godliness in the soul—this is the general meaning of infirmity. In short, it implies a nature that means to do right, that wants to do right, but that feels itself met by influences that are stronger, more cunning, and more seductive than it has skill to resist. This explains the majority of those transgressions over which men mourn. Nine parts in ten of those sins which men confess and mourn over, are sins which they did not set out to commit, which they did not want to commit, which they are sorry they have committed, but which they committed through weakness—weakness in

the power of understanding and interpreting facts; weakness in that general knowledge of cause and effect which might have saved them from wrong-doing. Half of our sins are violations of natural law—if there is any distinction between natural laws and moral laws. The greater proportion of men's sins are those which they commit through infirmity.

The attempt to maintain a spiritual life in this world is an attempt against great adversarial powers. It is no small thing for a man born into a fleshly body, connected with the material world, and beat in upon by ten thousand biasing and sympathizing influences which come from the body of human society, to lift himself out from all that is low and carnal into an atmosphere where he can see clearly, and understand, and maintain vigilance, persevering unto the end. And God is not indifferent to the task and tax which one undertakes when, with so many obstacles to contend against, he endeavors to live a life of obedience. God looks upon it as a thing most difficult. He knows it is a thing hard in itself. He knows, too, that the majority of men are weak, so that it is extremely difficult for them to do right things and avoid wrong things. God does not stand like a burning furnace of rage and wrath to consume a sinner because he sins. He pities a sinner. He sympathizes with the poor and the feeble. Probably he is more lenient toward the sinner than toward any other creature in the universe. Though he sees that his sin is sin; though he sees how devastating its tendencies are; though he sees how full it is of pain that may go on breeding pain forever and forever; though he has all knowledge of what is the exceeding sinfulness of sin, there is no being that looks upon it with more pity, more compassion, more sympathetic helpfulness, than that same God.

Let us specialize some of the spheres of sympathy in which the spirit of God acts with reference to us. I shall but glance at the most of them, in order that I may spend more time on the last one, which is less frequently a matter of consideration.

All the difficulties which lie in our life in the material body; all our physical wants; all our bodily weaknesses and sicknesses, and the infelicities that arise from them—these things men who are in health are very hard and uncharitable about. Many a person with whom you have to do disappoints you—does not fulfill your expectation. Many a person lets fly casual words which irritate you. But if you knew out of what utter weakness, if you know out of what a sense of almost deathly feebleness, these things often come, methinks it would excite in you, as doubtless it does in God, a spirit of pity and compassion, rather than of blame for their wrong-doing. There needs to be pity for the sinning, although their sins are to be repressed. God has sympathy

and compassion for those who have temptations that are preying upon them, and who are weakened by over-exertion, or who suffer in body from hunger and thirst and cold and various wants, or who are in discouragement and despondency of mind, so that they are led to do things which are wrong. Society may disregard them (as it mostly does; for men are very cruel to wrong-doers on the lower plane of life); but there is one Heart that never forgets them, nor ceases to compassionate them. There is one summery place for people who are sinning or doing evil things. It is the heart of the Divine Spirit.

What appetites and passions inhere in the body, and are its engineers, and minister to its existence, and feed and strengthen it, and overact, or act in disparity, and lead to partialisms, governing the whole economy of life in men! There are men who sin on account of these lordly elements, which dominate over the other parts of their nature. And yet, God, though he is not indulgent toward their sin, sympathizes with men who are pressed out of all measure by these internal forces. It is not any less wrong for a man to be ugly, because he has a fountain of ugliness in him, or because he has a belluine nature to contend with. This cruel and wicked disposition is to be repressed. But there never was a man whose stomach and liver, whose bodily organs, and whose mental forces, combined to keep him in a suffering and exaggerated condition out of which come the most intolerable manifestations of temper, that God did not feel pity for him. When you see such a man, you call him a hateful old curmudgeon; and he comes to despise himself; and he gets to be ugly; and he becomes desperate, and does things that are wrong, and even commits crimes. But there is a Being who looks on these things, and knows what the man suffers, and what the infirmities are out of which they spring. There is many a man that is disagreeable in a neighborhood, that you do not like to have much to do with, that mixes bitterness in the cup of life for his own lips and the lips of others, and is a disturber of his own household, and, in a moment of passion, commits the fatal deed which shall carry him to the gallows. And he says, "There is no use now. I shall die, and I shall be damned when I die; and I may as well take it as I find it." But still God broods over him, and pities him, and would help him. And if there could be developed in every such man a belief that there is a Spirit that pities his infirmities, while he reprehends and punishes his actual transgressions; if every sinning man could be made to feel that God is sorry for him, and that he has a nature which would lead him to do by the sinner as a father or mother would do by an erring child, training him out of his childish faults and into manly virtues; if every man that has fallen into evil ways could have that knowl-

edge, how many men might be transformed, and made better, if not perfect, in manhood.

In all the cares or burdens or trials which arise from our condition of temporal life, we have also the thought and compassion and sympathy of the Spirit of God. Men feel that when they go into business they go away from religion, and that secular cares and burdens and trials are, as it were, counterparts to virtues and religious experiences. But if there be anything susceptible of demonstration, it is that the decree of God made the secular experiences of life a means of grace. The necessities to which we are subject in life are normal. It was on purpose that God made us merchants, and mechanics, and toilers in every way. To *work* is not the curse. To *drudge* is. To *work* is a part of the blessing of our organization, and of that whole organization of society by which all men are necessitated to occupy morning and noon and night in tasking and taxing their physical powers or their understanding. It is a part of the vast economy of education. Intellectual, social and moral education inheres in that. And our religion is to go with it. It is to be a part of our experience, as our experience is a part of our moral and religious life. And so, all the cares, and all the burdens, and all the trials, and all the mingled matters of experience which make men so tired of life—these are infirmities. They are a part of that constitution of things and of nature which God recognizes, and which draws the heart of God continually toward men in all helpfulness. He does not say that sinning is not sinful, but he recognizes the liability to sin. And as the parent in the family, recognizing the child's liability to sin, overhangs the child, and seeks to lead him away from wrongs that come out of its weaknesses, so the heart of God overhangs with sympathy and perpetual help those that love him, and are willing to receive the blessings that he would confer upon them.

God also sympathizes with us in all our domestic infirmities—in the carriage of ourselves one toward one another. I have noticed in concerts that if two violinists play together, although, before they came upon the platform they tuned their instruments, no sooner do they get ready to strike off than they try their instruments again. And by the time they have played one or two pieces, there is such divergence between the instruments that they require to be again tuned. But the violin of the musician has not one fifth as many strings as the human violin has, and it is not half as sensitive to the changes of the weather, and does not need to be screwed up or down half so often. And you cannot keep this little mechanical instrument in tune except with great pains. The least jar, or the least atmospheric change, produces an aberration this way or that. And do you suppose you can take two instruments, each having fifty strings, more susceptible even

than those of a violin, and have them in tune one with another, in the midst of the many and powerful influences which are constantly tending to produce discord between them?

A man that knows how to take his mind with all its sensibilities, and bring it into tune with divine love, and who knows how to carry it harmoniously through all the hours of the day, so that it shall all the time be in tune with other minds, has very little to learn before it goes to heaven.

Now, our business in life is to try to keep this fiddle of ours so that it shall be at peace, first with its own self, and then with others. But we cannot keep at peace with ourselves so long as one side is blaming the other side; so long as the lower feelings are rasping the higher feelings; so long as combativeness is howling at the moral sentiments; so long as the appetites and passions are uproarious, and are carrying on all sorts of mischief. It is a hard thing for a man to take such an instrument as the human mind, and keep it in tune with itself, and also keep it in accord with this that and the other mind, with their different temperaments, and in all their varying moods, and under all their trials and swayings and warpings and biasings. I tell you, when a man says that he is perfect already, I feel that there is only one of two places for him, and that is heaven or the lunatic asylum. Not that I do not believe in perfection. I do believe in it. I believe it is *possible* in this world. But I never have seen the accomplishment of it. And the specimens that are generally sent out as samples have not induced me to buy. I believe that ideally there is provision for men to be perfect. And I believe there are a great many that are perfect in a certain way. That is to say, there is no difficulty in a man being perfect if you make the standard low enough. If one comply with certain metaphysical conditions of perfectness, I do not know why he may not be metaphysically perfect, though at the same time he is personally and dispositionally imperfect. But when you consider what it is to be absolutely perfect; when you consider what perfection requires; when you consider what wide-reaching comprehension, what exquisite planning, what peace within, what harmony with other men, what accomplishing power in things right and true, and what a realization not only of the objects of this life but of the fruitions of the life which is to come, are required in those that are perfect, you do not hope to see many perfect people on earth. There is nothing so grand as the kingdom of the human soul, with its wide-reaching results, its deep penetrating roots, and its magnificent blossoms and fruit, where perfection reigns; but we are not apt to come across men in this world to whom we can point and say, "They are perfect." Angels laugh at the idea of men becoming perfect in the

ways which they think will lead to perfection ; and we might as well wipe out the fantasy which prevails on this subject.

The hardest thing for us to do is first to live right within ourselves, and then to live right with each other. There must be justice not only in the speech of our lips, but in our thoughts. I hold that a true man no more indulges in evil thoughts than in evil expressions. One who has real nobility of soul does not even allow himself to think uncharitable things of men, but is purer toward them in his inward life than in any outward development.

Now, in this great conflict, where there is so much turmoil and rasping and irritation, where there is so much of sadness, where there are so many hearts broken, where there are so many men that carry burdens, it is a comfort to me to hear God say, by his brooding Spirit, "I help, in those respects, your infirmities." It comforts me to hear it said, "Ye have not an high-priest which cannot be touched with a feeling of your infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as ye are, yet without sin."

Lastly, the sympathy of God is with the hidden and superior trials of the nobler parts of our souls—with those troubles which spring from the exercise of the higher traits, as well as with those which I have specified.

In the first place, there are a great many poetic natures who are subject to extreme variations ; who are all flush and hopeful in one hour, and all drooping and empty in another ; who are subject both to the intensities of belief, and to the intensities of unbelief ; who at times, hardly understanding the constitution from which these things spring, are perplexed and annoyed ; but who, at other times, discerning the forces that are at work in and around them, are cheered and encouraged. "All things are open and naked unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do ;" and God sympathizes with our moods, with the ever-shifting shades of transient and poetic feeling,—which are said to be "imaginary," as if the imagination were not a fact as much as any other fact in life.

Then there are those who are living in a perpetual discontent of this life. They cannot cease to take an interest in it. Nature provides that they shall not let go even if they wish to. But there are times when there comes to them such a sense of the littleness of life, its evanescence, and its valuelessness, that they seem to themselves to be as so many ants or worms. The whole economy of life oftentimes seems to be one of such vanity and vexation of spirit that a man is almost willing to lay down his burden, even if he does it by his own volition, and go out of life, saying to himself, "Better is the day of one's death than the day of one's birth." One is tempted, under such circumstances, to

doubt himself; to doubt his friends; to doubt everybody; to doubt everything. All the weaknesses of men, all their short-comings, all their petty treacheries and insincerities, all their lies, all their snatches of ambition, all their fever-heats, all the elements that go to constitute the imperfection of a nascent and growing creature, come up before one's mind, and he is very strongly tempted to scoff and sneer at them. And where this feeling of contempt for one's fellow men is accompanied by a sense of one's own worthlessness, the whole world is good for nothing in his view. In such moods a man is ashamed of himself, and he hates himself for falling into such philanthropic states of mind. Nevertheless, there is a *Spirit that helps our infirmity*; that knows how we are tried; that understands our nature; that teaches and succors and cures men; and that by love brings them back to reason, and to charity, and to peace.

Then, there are moods in which annihilation reigns. The eye sees not, and the ear hears not, and the understanding understands not, and the heart feels not. One is dead, seemingly. There are times when men of a sensitive nature seem to themselves to lose their hold on life. They fall off from the interest of the human race, and from everything. And these arid, desert experiences God understands. He knows what they come from. He knows how many transgressions spring out of them. And he pities and helps them.

Then there are those moments of intense yearning which turn all common feelings pale. There are those fears lest truth shall have been a fable, after all. There are those hours of unspeakable anguish which men pass through where they seem to themselves to be letting go of all that is most sacred in the past; where all the thoughts that are perfumed with the associations of home-life are taking flight; and where the tree of religious life that once was full of birds, and full of blossoms and leaves for the healing of want, is bare and desolate. In this mood the Bible seems to them but a congeries of chance things. And there are times when the soul throws up its hands in despair, and gives up everything.

I do not blame these states. I feel sorry for them. And among those that experience them there are, not unfrequently, great and reverent natures—men who are making a transition from the old to the new; that is, making the new newer than it was before. There must needs be some that shall go through such passages of feeling. They are afraid to express their doubts, because there is nothing less sympathized with than doubt and unbelief. To say that a man is an infidel, is to put him out of the pale of sympathy, almost. And yet, a man may be an infidel, and be a better man than you are. A man may not reverence the sanctuary, and worship the Book, and give his

adhesion to creeds, as you do; but he may be in a state in which God is preparing him, by suffering, to lead men out of their troubles. The very sufferings from fear and doubt and apprehension through which a man is going may be fitting him for the work which God has for him to do. And though a man may be enveloped in the darkness of unbelief, and though he may be fractious and wayward, and refuse to have God to rule over him, he may not be so bad as many who do believe, and do not live up to the light which they have. An unbelief that springs from real honest investigation and aspiration for higher truth or for a better expression of universal truth than they have ever had, is an experience which few have sympathy for in this world. But the heart of God will take care of those that turn to him with filial love, and will bring them through all these moods.

If there are any in this congregation who are unsettled, sometimes thinking one thing, and sometimes another, now going into churches that have the most outward forms and visible worship, and where the senses have rest, and now breaking away and going into churches where services appeal more to the higher reason and the moral sentiments, you may seem to yourself an Ishmaelite, a vagabond, an unworthy wretch; and yet, you have not gone out of the charmed circle of God's thought and sympathy and love. He broods over you still. And though you let go of everything else, do not let go of faith and trust. Keep the avenue open between you and God. Keep the door of your heart open so that there shall be that intercourse between your soul and the Divine Spirit by which he shall bring you safely to a glorious issue.

In view of the truths thus opened, I remark, first, that the administrative power of the moral world is love—not power, and not penalty. Penalty is a part of justice, and a part of the organization of nature. We do not need to undertake to prove that sin brings pain, and that pain is the penalty of the transgression of law, and that it is a part of the original economy of God's universe that sin and suffering should be indissolubly connected. The whole creation is a witness of that. All the tears that have been shed are so many showers of the testimony of the anguish of the world. All its discord, all its immeasurable depths of suffering, are so many memorials of this original and organic and invisible constitution of justice. That which we needed was not a revelation to tell us that God was just, and that law was sovereign, and that disobedience had penalty, and that penalty would smite and work, and smite and work, and smite and work. That did not need to be revealed. The eye saw it; the ear heard it; every sense experienced it. Our whole life has been but one voluminous history of this original economy of the globe, for purposes of truth, and obedience,

and of justice followed by penalty. What we needed to know, was, that this was not the only nor the dominant influence, but that there was over all this a power which was something better than this to our apprehension. The power of love, and the power of sympathy, and the power of succor through sympathy and love—that is the revelation of the Bible. That is the New Testament doctrine. It is that while we are living in a world which expresses God's organic purpose of justice and penalty, we are also living in a world which is overarched by a domestic economy, by a celestial economy, by a providence and a grace, which work by the power of sympathy and love. So that while nature teaches the justice of God, and the punishment of sin, the Gospel teaches the recuperative power of divine sympathy and divine love.

Wherefore, it is to me an unspeakable comfort that the tendency of the historic influence of the past, the great growth of the future, and the wondrous and distinctive peculiarity of the day in which we live, is to work away from materialism and sin and penalty, toward spirituality and obedience and love. Justice, like a comet, sweeps away from the sun; but love, like that comet reclaimed and turned, shoots right toward it. And we are on the way toward it; only when we reach it, we shall never turn and fly away from it again.

Therefore, in time and history we have seen the worst. Individuals will be as bad as they have been, single organizations will be as bad, nations will be as bad; but, taking the world as a whole, it is rising, and is to rise. *No weapon formed against God shall prosper.* Let men seek to fill the earth with doubt and unbelief: there will be a light put through that. Let men seek to make governments throughout the world more monarchical: their efforts will be neutralized by the march of the principle of universal Liberty. God's power will break through and shatter all combinations that undertake to hinder the onward progress of the race. Mankind are yet to be enfranchised. Intelligence, virtue and moral inspiration, joined to the spirit of God, are going to prevail. God is abroad on that work, and is working wondrously, and working comprehensively far beyond our perception; and he is working in the line of love; and he will work until he has repaired all the mischief that has been done by sin and imperfection.

I remark, secondly, that cases of the longest delayed repentance are not without hope. The man that has been the worst in life; the man whose case is most difficult of management; the man that has the most to overcome and the least to show of good living, has encouragement to repent and turn to God.

There are a great many men who are reckless, and who say, "There is no use in your troubling yourself about me. Go for others. I am a castaway, and am spoiled. Do not waste your time and strength in trying to do anything for me."

It is very true that an old tree can never be made to be like a young one. You cannot train it. But you may take a tree that is a hundred years old, and that is dead with the exception of one or two branches, and take away the spent earth from about its roots, and put fresh soil in its place, and prune off all but the living branches, and give it a chance to sprout again, and it will thrive and become a fruit-growing tree once more; though it will never be such a tree as it would have been if it had been trained right from the start.

A man may be dead on one side, and dead on another side; he may be full of evil on this side and on that side; he may be quite beyond his own power of recuperation; but if he can be brought under the vivifying influence of the spirit of God, and if he give himself up to the direction of the divine power, it is possible for him, though he be one of the worst of men, to be reformed. The lyingest man may become a truth speaker; the hardest drinking man may become sober; the most lecherous man may become pure; the most deceitful man may become upright; the most dishonest man may become honest; the most vindictive man may be made peaceable and mild. The eagle may change his nature and the leopard his spots, in this new economy of divine grace, and there is no man in my hearing to whom I may not most freely say, "The Spirit understands your sins; he knows the causes from which they spring; he loves you; he is the best friend you have in the universe; and if God be for you who can be against you?" Not your sins, not the devil, no tempting influences, can lead you to destruction if once you commit yourselves to the hands of the living God, and keep near to him. God can save you, and nothing else can.

I remark, once more, that this sympathy of God is not given as a reward of man's own well-doing or of his victory in the struggles which he has been called to wage. I say this to meet an almost universal feeling, rather than conviction, that if a man becomes a Christian, and lives aright, he shall have God's favor and love. Children feel so, and young people feel so, and grown people feel so. Men are apt to say, "If I were to avoid all vices, and leave off all faults, and read the Bible, and say my prayers every day, and go to church like a good Christian, and keep Sunday, and watch my conduct in every way, so that God should see that I was in earnest, I believe that he would give me the joy of his salvation." In other words, men have the notion that God holds divine help as a premium, and says, "Now study and work; and if you will come up to such a point I will give it to you. Otherwise you cannot have it." That is as if a physician should stand before a man who was suffering from excruciating cramps, and should hold out tempting fruits and solacing, refreshing and remedial drinks,

and offer to give them to him if he would stop the cramps and get up and come to him. If unaided he could have stopped his cramps and walked, he would not have sent for the doctor, and would not have thanked anybody to help him. What he wants is some one to come to his side and minister to him remedies that shall relieve his sufferings and restore his health and strength.

There is an impression that Christ is a premium-giver, and that he says, "If you will work and acquire a capital, then I will help you." No; there is given you a capital to begin with. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his own good pleasure." You have the divine help to start on.

Before any daisy or violet, before any blossom, is seen in the field, the sun lies with its bosom to the ground, crying to the flower, and saying, "Why tarriest thou so long?" And day after day the sun comes, and pours its maternal warmth upon the earth, and coaxes the plant to grow and bloom. And when days and weeks have passed, the root obeys the call, and sends out its germ, from which comes the flower. And it was the sun that brooded it into life. Had it not been for the sun's warmth and light, the flower could never have come to itself.

So the Eternal Spirit of God rests on the human soul, warming it, quickening it, calling it, and saying, "Oh, my son! where art thou?" And at last it is this divine sympathy and brooding influence that brings men to God, and leads them to say, "Am I not sinful?" and to yearn for something higher and purer and holier. It was God's work. He long ago was *working in you, to will and to do of his own good pleasure.*

Therefore let me say to any man that wants to be a Christian, You need not feel that you must wait a week or a month before you can begin. God has been pleading with you already. It is he that gave you the thought of becoming a Christian; it is he that gave you the impulse to try to become one; it is he that gave you the first slight yearning warmth of soul which you experienced. He is beforehand with you. And he will not wait till you have achieved before he will achieve for you, by you, and in you. He is doing exceeding abundantly more for you than you can ask or think.

To the guidance of that good God let every soul commit itself. Feeble in knowledge; ignorant of the way in which we are walking, and of many things that hinder our progress; blinded as to truth, and moral truth; knowing less about those things which we most need to know than we think we do; constantly subject to oscillation and variation—to moods that go up, and moods that go down; proud, and selfish, and

bating and hateful; frequently cruel to each other, and more cruel to ourselves, deceiving others, and striving to deceive God; full of bitterness; of the earth, earthy—oh! what shall we do with such natures as ours, if there be no sweetening influence, no divine Leader, no Spiritual Instructor?

To that dear Spirit of all light, and all knowledge, and all comfort, I commit you. Put your heart in the summer of divine love, and remember that “all things work together for good to them that love God.”



PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

Our Heavenly Father, we draw near to thee not to behold darkness nor to hear thunders; for thou art the God of truth and justice; and thine administration is love. That our souls know right well. We have met together by thy power. We have been kept, if not unto salvation, yet in the way, and with the hope, with the anticipation, and with many of the joys and foretastes thereof. And we rejoice, O Lord, our God! that that work which thou hast begun in time, and which has been kept back and hindered by drought, by frost, and by ill-timed seasons, shall yet know a fairer summer, and shall spring up into blossom and into fruit, by the side of the river of the water of life. It is in this hope that we comfort ourselves all the way, in all the infelicities of the way—in all our sorrows; in all our infirmities; and in all those sins which cause us pain. We look forward from out of these things, and live by faith of the better land, and of the better life, and of that better self which shall be ours when we shall be where thou art—when we shall be transformed. For now are we what yet the drops are that hang dark in the heaven, unsunned and full of storm; and then shall we be as the drops are when the sun shines upon them, as they hang upon the grass or the flower, full of glory and beauty, the storm having gone by. Now we are hanging in trouble, in fear, and in pangs of pain; now we are driven about by mighty winds hither and thither; but then we shall be as the angels of heaven. Then, standing before thee in the light of knowledge, and in the purity of sympathy, and in the joy of full fruition, all thine excellence shall work upon us, and we shall be satisfied. Then we shall see thee as thou art. Thee, whom we have fondly longed for, we shall see more beautiful than our fancy had created thee; more august, more generous, more tender and loving, more full of beauty and grandeur, than we have been able to think thee. Not anything shall be taken away from thee; but that obstruction which mars our apprehension of thee, through the imperfectness of our understanding, shall be removed. As they who look out upon a garden of wondrous beauty, filled with rare plants and flowers, through windows full of wrinkles and contortions, behold these things, but see them unnaturally reflected; and as, when the light comes to them without interruption of glass, they behold the same things, and they appear sweet and perfect; so we, seeing through a glass darkly, distort thee with lines of our own thought, and of our own prejudice, and with the sharp points of our sins; but we shall behold thee without any medium between. We shall see thee as thou art. We shall see thee face to face. We shall be like thee, so that we can see thee out of our own experience. We shall interpret thee. And we shall

then be satisfied—yea glorified, filled and overflowing with rapture begun. And that experience shall have no decadence, no pause, no end.

Now, O Lord! we pray that this high hope may never die out of our heaven, nor suffer eclipse. May it be the one point toward which we shall push with all the force of our life. May we consider everything else as something aside, as by the way. May this one hope of our redemption, immortality, and glory, in the heavenly land through the Lord Jesus Christ, hang over us, as a guiding star. May it be to us as the gate of heaven. And though at times it may be hid for a little while, ere long may it break through every cloud and storm, to cheer and comfort us. And in all the strife which we make to live worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, be thou on our side. How many and how mighty are our adversaries! How much we contest the visible by things invisible! May we believe that thou art not far from any one of us, and that thou art carrying our armor for us, and inspiring our courage, and aiding the stroke of our hands, so that we shall be conquerors and more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

May we not desire to separate ourselves from the sympathy of the Lord Jesus Christ—no, not for one moment. May we be able to do those things that please thee, so that, standing by our side, we shall see thy face smiling upon us. May we avoid everything of which we cannot speak to thee, and on which we cannot ask thy blessing. Help us to overcome our sin and our inward badness, and what remains of earthiness in us. And may we seek more and more to fill our life and nature with those holy passions which shall bring us into sympathy and accord with thee and thy heavenly host. Bless this assembly that are gathered together here this morning. Hear their confession of their sins. Hear the silent confessions of waiting hearts, and hearts weighed down with imperfection and weakness. And we pray that thou wilt inspire hope in all those that desire to forsake evil. May they see that the way to virtue is straight and narrow; and that God stands therein to help them; and that he will never leave them nor forsake them; and that he will love them with more than a father's love, and strengthen them with the might of the everlasting God. And may none be afraid to turn from evil unto the pure way. May all feel that in turning toward thee, they turn toward power, and wisdom, and sympathy, and all gathering goodness.

And we pray, O Lord! if there be those in thy presence who are in sorrow or bereavement, who are in manifold affliction, that they may find the communion of the Spirit refreshing and comforting to their souls. For thou art the Consoler. Thou art the Comforter. Ten thousand hast thou comforted in prison, on the scaffold, in the wilderness, on beds of sickness, in solitary places. Thou hast comforted the home-sick and the heart-broken. O, Lord, the Comforter! how great has been thy work upon the earth! How full has the world been of thee! How wondrous has been the administration of thy grace! What dear and beauteous hours have descended into dark days! What angelic experiences have come to men in prisons! And how hast thou taught men the blessings of suffering and sorrow, and made them strong in weakness! May they be rich in poverty, and may they have joy in sorrow. Thou hast not forgotten the sacred lesson. Thou art the Comforter still. Not as one man is comforter to another art thou; but thy comforting influence is spread all abroad through the heaven and the earth, among all the sorrowing. Thou dost love with divine and sacred energy, and dost grant consolation to all that are in trouble. And if there are any to-day who are in bereavement or sorrow, and all of whose memory when they turn to the past is dark, O Lord! give them release; or, give them thy presence, if it be better that they should yet endure chastisement.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt bless those who are tried by their cares and perplexities. May they still have strength valiantly to do the work

which is appointed in thy providence for them, and to persevere unto the end.

We pray that there may be many and many of us who shall be builders in the day in which we dwell, establishing blessed institutions in society upon foundations which shall go on generations after they are gathered to their fathers, working for the amelioration of men.

We pray that thou wilt bless all those who are laboring in the Sunday-school and in the Bible-classes. Bless the labors of those who are going from house to house, or into the highways, to minister to those that are not gathered into the sanctuary. And grant that they may have the Sacred Spirit and inspiration of God upon them. Teach them both to love and teach. Bless all the Churches that are gathered together this day in this city, and in the great city near us, and throughout all our land. We pray that thy servants may be prepared to preach the Gospel with more understanding and sympathy and power. May revivals of religion break out on every side, and spread through all our land, and stay the mighty evils and the mighty temptations to unbelief and doubt which are setting in. Grant that there may come this twilight of faith; and more and more may the heart prove mightier to reason than the head, so that all men may receive the truth unto salvation.

Bless we pray thee, the government of these United States. Bless the President, and all who are in authority with him. Bless the Congress assembled, and the Legislatures of the various States. May they devise things wise and honest. And grant, we beseech of thee, that our magistrates everywhere may be God-fearing men, who shall administer the trusts reposed in them with love toward their fellow men, and with sacred fidelity. May this nation grow purer with age, and with strength more humane. May it not tread down the weak and helpless, but be the benefactor of nations. And may its example kindle hope in other lands. Lead men step by step through virtue to true piety, And at last may thy word, long delayed, be fulfilled, and the earth see thy salvation.

We ask it for Christ's sake. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Our Father, we pray that thy blessing may rest upon the word spoken. Grant that there may be some souls drawn to make experience of thy love and thoughtful care. In thee we live. We have our being in thee. We desire to rejoice in the Lord. We desire to be strong in thee. We desire to walk in thy strength. And when, at last, through thine unspeakable favor we shall have accomplished the duty of our life, and passed by its wide and dreary reachings, grant that we may be admitted into thine heavenly kingdom, to dwell forever with the Lord.

And to thy name, Father, Son and Spirit, shall be praise everlasting. *Amen.*

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